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ABSTRACT

A study generated a system for describing and analyzing the shifting focus from reader to text in written responses to literature, and explored the stances that readers adopt as they focus on personal, textual, and extra-textual concerns. Ten proficient and 10 less proficient undergraduate readers engaged in open-ended, exploratory written responses to 4 literary texts outside of the classroom setting. Analyses suggested that proficient and less proficient readers respond to literary reading in fundamentally different ways. Less proficient readers tend to focus heavily on "reader bound" descriptions of personal experience, while proficient readers tend to use personal experience as a way of reflecting on textual and extra-textual events. Analyses revealed that while all readers in the study journeyed into their own world, the world of the text, and the world beyond, proficient readers explored these worlds through a stance of connecting and extending, while less proficient readers often seemed to adopt a posture of disconnecting and escaping. (A table and two figures are included.) (Author/PRA)

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MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF LITERATURE AND LIFE

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RUNNING HEAD: MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE

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MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF LITERATURE AND LIFE

ABSTRACT

This study presents a system for describing and analyzing the shifting focus from reader to text in written responses to literature. The study also explores the stances that readers adopt as they focus on personal, textual, and extra-textual concerns. Ten proficient and ten less proficient undergraduate readers engaged in open-ended, exploratory written responses to four literary texts outside of the classroom setting. Analyses suggest that proficient and less proficient readers respond to literary reading in fundamentally different ways. Less proficient readers tend to focus heavily on "reader bound" descriptions of personal experience, while proficient readers tend to use personal experience as a way of reflecting on textual and extra-textual events. Analyses revealed that while all readers in this study journeyed into their own world, the world of the text, and the world beyond, proficient readers explored these worlds through a stance of connecting and extending, while less proficient readers often seemed to adopt a posture of disconnecting and escaping.

MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF LITERATURE AND LIFE

From its earliest inception, research on the process of literary reading has focused, to some degree, on the respective roles of reader and text in the response and interpretation process. Studies from cognitive, social-cognitive, speech act, and psychoanalytic perspectives have examined aspects of readers that influence the response process (Applebee, 1978; Beach, 1990; Beach & Wendler, 1987; Galda, 1983a; Holland, 1985; Hunt & Vipond, 1985; Hynds, 1985, 1989; Langer, 1989; Vipond & Hunt, 1984). Other studies from linguistic, psycholinguistic, and literary theoretical perspectives have examined aspects of texts that influence the process (Beach & Brown, 1987; Jose, 1984; Radway, 1984; Willinsky & Hunniford, 1986; Zaharias, 1986).

Many theoretical accounts of the literary response process emanate from a "transactional" view, which characterizes literary reading as an intermingling of, or a shuttling of attention between the ideas, perceptions, and preconceptions of the reader and the experience and perspectives potentially evoked from the words on the page (Holland, 1975a, 1975b; Hunt & Vipond, 1985; Rosenblatt, 1978, 1985). This transactional view is premised on the notion that reader and text cannot be separated, but are "aspects of a total situation" (Rosenblatt, 1985, p. 8), in which each reciprocally defines and is defined by the other.

This study describes a system for mapping the movement from reader to text in readers' written responses to literary reading, for understanding the stances that readers adopt in the process, and for exploring the outcomes of those stances within the response and interpretive process. A brief review of relevant research will document the growing interest in

reader-text dimensions of literary reading.

"Reader" and "Text" in Literary Reading

Early research on the literary response process investigated factors in the reader or the text which contributed to particular categories of response (i.e., evaluation, engagement). These categorical treatments of response set the stage for a growing interest the actual processes which occur when readers transact with texts. In recent years, studies have begun to consider reader and text, not as isolated entities, but as mutually influential aspects of the literary experience. Such studies collectively suggest that readers who focus exclusively on themselves or exclusively on the text, as well as readers whose responses reflect a limited number of meaning-making purposes, operate from a perspective that ignores the complexity and indeterminacy of the literary encounter (Galda, 1983; Golden and Guthrie, 1986; MacLean, 1986; Langer, 1986, 1989; Flynn, 1983).

In an early study of reader- and text- focused aspects of the literary response process, Applebee (1973) differentiated between evaluations which were reader-centered ("I" statements focusing on reader's ideas, not text) and text-centered responses (statements describing characters, setting or plot). In an elaboration of Applebee's "reader-text" distinction, Galda (1983) created a framework for describing the comprehension and evaluation processes revealed in transcripts of student discussions about literature. Her study was an exploration of what she termed the "dialectic" between reader and text (p. 2). In Galda's system, readers' processes of "involvement," "comprehension," and "inference," as well as Applebee's four levels of "evaluation" were divided into "text-centered" and "reader-

centered" aspects. Reader- and text-centered responses in this system were not tied to particular types of statements (i.e., comprehension, engagement, inference). For example, there could be "reader-centered" comprehension responses (i.e., complaints about the lack of understanding) or "text-centered" comprehension responses (i.e., restatements of the plot), and so forth. Thus, she described a whole range of literary responses, in terms of their respective focus on reader or text.

Similarly, Golden (1978) studied the ways in which readers focus on themselves or the text in literary reading. She argued that readers approach literary reading by referring to themselves, the world, or the text. In her study, "exophoric" references related to personal experiences, or to the world, while "endophoric" references focused on the structure or content of the text. Fifth graders in Golden's study made more exophoric responses than did eighth graders. Thus, she concluded that "as children move into the upper grades, the focus may shift from the child to the text or the subject (p. 28)."

A few studies have explored the role of readers' identification and empathic processes in their interpretations of literature. In a study of adult basic learners, Coles and Wall (1987) found that, in contrast to views that equate cognitive maturity with greater detachment and objectivity, all of the study's informants approached literary reading from a stance of identification. Citing Ohmann (1976), Coles and Wall argued that students bring "personal histories" to the reading process. They distinguished, however, between readers who become enmeshed in their own personal experience, and readers who use that experience to reach an understanding of the world around them. In their words, "one cannot

generalize in any politically powerful way if all one sees in a book is the individual self--'only your reflection' (1987, p. 309)."

Golden and Guthrie (1986) identified two reader-oriented factors (beliefs and empathy) and two text-oriented factors (story events and character conflict) that accounted for convergence and divergence in readers' responses to texts. They found that readers' responses diverged in the categories of "empathy," and "conflict," and converged in the areas of "plot events and "personal beliefs." That is, the ninth grade readers in this study tended to agree on the basic plot and on their beliefs about mother-daughter relationships, but differed in their empathy for particular characters and their perceptions of the story's conflict. The researchers concluded that empathizing with a particular character influences readers' tendencies to link the story's conflict with that character. Their findings support the importance of exploring how empathy relates to interpretation in literary reading, and challenge "extremist positions that claim that interpretation is necessarily either text- or reader-based (p. 420)."

Recently, researchers have turned their attention to the specific processes by which readers bring personal knowledge to literary texts. Beach (1990) described reading as a "recursive" process, where readers use "the text to reflect on experience and the experience to reflect on the text (p. 233)." Beach found five purposes associated with readers' autobiographical responses: narrating experience, using experience to reflect on the text, using the text to reflect on experience, and interpreting the text.

In studying social and socio-cognitive aspects of the response

process, Hynds (1985, 1989) demonstrated that factors of motivation and perceptions of the purposes of reading influenced whether readers brought, or failed to bring, personal experiences to textual events (1989). In particular, outside reading (literary interest) was related to the tendency to bring personal constructs to bear upon the reading and interpretive process (1985, 1989).

Galda (1982) noted the difference between readers who respond from "reality bound perspectives" and those who are able to "evaluate texts as wholes," and "to consider the text events as valid possibilities or alternate interpretations of reality (p 18)." She compared a reader who responded almost entirely in unelaborated evaluations, with no details from the text, to another reader who "analyzed both the text and her own responses as she sought explanations for both literary and real life experiences (p. 17)."

In her study of reader- and text-based aspects of literary reading, Flynn (1983) differentiated among readers who "dominate" literary texts with their own perceptions, readers who are "submissive" (becoming totally controlled by the text) and readers who maintain an "interactive" stance (i.e., "the reader learns from the experience without losing critical distance; reader and text interact with a degree of mutuality . . . . Self and other remain distinct and so create a kind of dialogue" [p. 237]).

Other recent studies are based upon an interactive view of literary reading. Cullinan, Harwood, & Galda (1983) argue that reading is a "multi-layered activity (in which) readers are building, synthesizing and paying attention to referents, all the while aware of images and feelings they experience. The reader becomes a meaning maker in interaction with the

text rather than a passive recipient of meaning embedded in a text by an author (p. 33)."

Also from an interactive perspective, MacLean (1986) draws upon Fillmore's (1981) concept that readers construe an "envisionment" of the text world in the reading experience. Her framework for analyzing this envisionment expands upon Fillmore's (1981) and Galda's (1983) system to include what she termed "interactive" responses. MacLean presented three fluent readers with expository journalistic texts and categorized their oral responses in a cloze procedure along a continuum ranging from "text bound" responses to "reader bound" responses. MacLean's categories of response were as follows: (a) "text bound" (b) "prior knowledge < text" (c) "prior knowledge = text" (d) "prior knowledge > text" (e) "reader bound". In MacLean's system, responses in category three ("prior knowledge = text") were considered "interactive" (MacLean, 1986, p. 18). Results of MacLean's study indicated that skilled readers apply their skills in interactive ways (the middle category), not in exclusively text bound or reader bound ways.

Thus, many studies of reader- and text-focused aspects of reading seem to operate from perspectives based upon the notion of an interaction between reader and text. This interactive view has served to move reading research beyond a consideration of texts as somehow autonomous from the prior knowledge and cognitive structures of readers. Recently, however, much interest has surrounded the notion of "literary" reading as a specialized process, whereby reader and text are not isolated entities, but are mutually transformed in the reading event. Rosenblatt (1985), for instance, contrasts interactive views of reading, where "the text on the

one hand, and the personality of the reader, on the other, can be separately analyzed (p. 100) with her "transactional" view of reading as a "dynamic process, in which all elements take on their character as part of the organically-interrelated situation (p. 100)." Furthermore, Rosenblatt has argued that:

> the earlier more limited interactional studies should be scrutinized and evaluated thoroughly in a transactional framework, with a healthy skepticism toward the tendency to hypostatize as entities what should be viewed as aspects of a transaction (p. 105).

Similarly, Vipond and Hunt (in Meutsch & Viehoff, in press) have argued that "reading should be looked at as a transaction among readers and texts and situations, rather than breaking it down into components and studying one component as if it could be understood in isolation from the others (pp. 60-61)."

Thus, research on literary reading is moving toward a recognition of the dynamic, fluid, and constantly shifting relationship between the reader and text in every phase of the reading process. However, many studies from an interactive framework, while perhaps recognizing the interrelation of reader and text, have continued to treat reader- and text- based aspects of the response process in isolation. This study attempts to move toward a more "transactive" view, which envisions reader and text as mutually and inextricably influential in the response and interpretive process.

The study was based upon the following questions:

1. What differences occur in the focus of proficient and less proficient readers' written responses along a continuum of reader to text?

2. What stances do readers appear to adopt as they evoke and reflect upon their own experience, the world of the text, and the world beyond?

Methods

Informants

Twenty second-semester freshmen from a suburban private college volunteered to participate in the study. In order to eliminate the effect of differential teaching methods on the study's findings, informants were chosen from two classes taught by the same teacher. Ten "less proficient" readers were volunteers from a developmental reading class to which they had been assigned because of their low verbal SAT scores. This group was composed of five males and five females. A group of ten "proficient" readers, consisting of five males and five females was also chosen. All ten proficient readers had attained a grade of B+ or better in their introductory English course. Furthermore, both the developmental reading class and the introductory English course featured informal, free response journal writing as a regular part of the curriculum. Thus, students from both classrooms were accustomed to producing ungraded written responses to literary texts in a class journal. These written responses often formed the basis for later class discussions.

Materials

Four short stories were chosen because they dealt with various aspects of the young adult experience, and were similar to stories that the informants might encounter in English classes in their college setting. The first story selected was Gina Berriault's (1982) "The Stone Boy" which focused on the way a young boy, Arnold, expressed his grief over

accidentally shooting and killing his older brother, Eugene, and the perceptions of Arnold's behavior by his family and other adults in the community. Bette Greene's (1985) "An Ordinary Woman" was told from a mother's point of view and dealt with the disparity between a woman's self-perception and others' perceptions as she was having the locks on her home changed to prevent the return of her teenage daughter who had started a fire while using drugs. "Fourth of July" by Robin Brancato (1985) explored how sixteen-year-old Chuck confronted his desire for revenge against a former friend, Sager, who had stolen money Chuck was saving for a car. The final story, "A Young Person with Get-Up-And-Go" by Ann Parsons (1978) described a young boy's keen awareness and resulting embarrassment toward his home and family, and his desperate attempt to improve his surroundings so that he could have a decent place to entertain his friends in an atmosphere of normalcy.

Procedures

Within a tradition of previous research (Beach, Appleman & Dorsey, 1990, Dixon & Stratta, 1985, Newell, Suszynski & Weingart, 1989) this study is based upon the assumption that readers' private response processes can be partially understood by analyzing their retrospective written responses. It must be acknowledged that differences in recall, as well as perceptions about "acceptable" classroom discourse may be confounding factors in using written prompts to capture readers' response process. However, informal retrospective writing offers the advantage of capturing readers' responses without disrupting the aesthetic absorption (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1985) so necessary for literary reading. Furthermore, because journal writing was a regular part of these students' experience, it was assumed that they would

see these tasks as expressive and exploratory, rather than formal, graded pieces of academic prose.

In order to further minimize the influence of task perceptions or concerns about evaluation on readers' responses, participants were asked to read and respond to the four short stories in two separate sittings outside of the regular classroom environment. They were told that their responses would in no way affect their grade, and that there were no "right" or "wrong" responses.

Each sitting lasted approximately 90 minutes (45 minutes per story). Both proficient and less proficient readers were in the same room and were allowed an unlimited amount of time to read each story. As soon as the last person finished reading each story, the participants were asked to write open-ended responses, similar to the ungraded journal responses that were a regular part of their classroom instruction. Although participants had an unlimited time to read each story, the time for written responses was limited to approximately 15 minutes per story. Limiting the time for written responses was an attempt to minimize the effect of loquacity or verbal fluency on responses. All participants had access to the texts if they chose to refer to them. The only instructions were to "respond to each story in any way they wanted to." The instructions were deliberately vague to elicit a broad range of responses and to eliminate responses that might have been written to coincide with some perception of investigator expectations.

Student responses were then typed verbatim, in order to eliminate the influence of handwriting or neatness on coders' judgments. Approximately six typewritten pages of response were produced from the written responses

of each student across all four short stories. Over 120 typed pages of data were analyzed in all.

Analyses

In order to understand the interrelation of reader- and text-focused aspects in readers' responses, statements in written protocols were categorized along a continuum of responses from "reader bound" to "text bound," developed by MacLean (1986) for studying readers' oral responses to expository texts. However, due to differences between expository and literary texts, as well as differences between written and oral discourse, some modifications were made in the category labels and in the instructions for coding data. The five categories in this study were identified as follows: a) text bound b) text-focused reflections c) integrative paraphrase d) reader-focused reflections e) reader bound. More explicit descriptions of these categories are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Written protocols for each student were separated into "idea units" by the researchers. These idea units represented complete remarks or thoughts, and roughly corresponded to "T-units" (Hunt, 1977). Each idea unit was coded by the two researchers into one of the five categories described in Table 1.

Initially, the researchers separately coded a subsample of 10 protocols. Interrater reliabilities for the five categories averaged .78 and ranged from .68 to .92. Because some of the reliabilities on this subsample were not particularly high, the researchers decided to code all

of the protocols separately, and to arrive at consensus for idea units where disagreement occurred.

A repeated measures Analysis of Variance, and subsequent pair-wise comparisons were conducted, in order to determine differences between proficient and less proficient readers across the five categories of response.

A preliminary look at individual written protocols indicated that proficient readers tended to shift more often than less proficient readers from one category to another during the course of their responses. For instance, proficient readers might begin from a reader bound comment, shift to a reader-focused reflection, move to a text bound comment, and so forth. Written responses of less proficient readers seemed more "static," by comparison. Readers tended to stay within particular categories of response, rather than shifting from one category to another. To capture aspects of the process or movement of readers' responses along the reader-text continuum, the researchers scored each written impression according to the number of shifts (occasions where responses shifted from one category to another) across all four stories. A One Way Analysis of Variance was conducted to determine differences between proficient and less proficient readers in numbers of shifts per reader across all four stories.

Subsequently, qualitative analyses were conducted in order to determine the overall stances that proficient and less proficient readers adopted while responding to the four literary texts. Initially, all protocols were read several times to determine whether they revealed evidence of particular stances underlying readers' responses. As representative categories were created, the data were re-examined in order

to find examples of these stances throughout the responses of all informants. When particular categories failed to yield sufficient examples from the data, they were redefined or collapsed into other categories. This qualitative analysis yielded two overriding stances and three sub-categories within each stance, which could be verified from the written report data.

Results

Comparisons of Proficient and Less Proficient Readers

As a group, less proficient readers had 11% fewer total idea segments in their written responses (total across all 4 stories = 818) than did proficient readers (total = 925). However, a One Way Analysis of Variance, comparing the two groups on numbers of idea units per reader across all four stories revealed no significant differences (F (1, 18) = 1.16, $p > .05$). Thus, readers in the two groups did not differ significantly on the numbers of idea units in their impressions.

Means and standard deviations of proficient and less proficient readers in each of the five categories of response are presented graphically in figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Results of a repeated measures Analysis of Variance, with proficiency as the between subjects factor and response type as the within subjects factor revealed a significant interaction (F (1, 18) = 4.36, $p < .01$).

In order to determine the source of this interaction, subsequent Tukey pair-wise analyses compared proficient and less proficient readers across

each category of response. These analyses revealed the only significant difference in the category of "reader focused reflections," where less proficient readers averaged a little over half the number of such responses across all four stories than did proficient readers. Comparisons of the two groups of readers on average numbers of "reader bound" responses across all four stories revealed an interesting but nonsignificant trend toward higher average numbers of such responses among less proficient readers than among proficient readers.

Thus, the significant interaction appears to be explained by the tendency of less proficient readers to center their written impressions in the "reader bound" category and the tendency of proficient readers toward "reader-focused reflections." Interestingly, all readers in this study appeared to hover toward the "reader" end of the reader-text continuum. This finding is especially noteworthy, in light of the fact that MacLean's (1986) proficient readers produced the greatest number of responses in the middle category, which she called "prior knowledge - text" ("integrative paraphrase" in this study). One explanation for the heavy focus on "reader bound" or "reader-focused reflection" responses in this study is that the literary texts may have afforded more personalized responses and provided far more gaps or "indeterminacies" (Iser, 1978) than the journalistic expository texts that MacLean used. Furthermore, MacLean's cloze task, which was designed to elicit comprehension rather than critical/analytical, engagement, or evaluation processes, might have directed readers' responses toward the middle of her continuum. Thus, in her study, readers who focused on the author's craft, textual details, or their own reader bound circumstances, might have been responding inappropriately for the task and

the expository text before them.

To further explore the process of readers' responses, a One Way Analysis of Variance, compared proficient and less proficient readers on total numbers of "shifts" across all four short stories. A "shift" was defined as a movement from one category to another. This analysis revealed a nonsignificant trend (F (1, 18) = 2.81, $p > .05$) toward higher average numbers of shifts across all four stories among proficient readers (M, 37.9; SD, 10.70) than among less proficient readers (M, 28.7; SD, 13.63). Thus, although proficient readers seemed to move more often from one response category to another than less proficient readers, the significance of this difference could not be statistically verified. It is important, however, to note the small sample size in this study. Perhaps a larger group comparison would reveal more striking differences than those presented in this preliminary exploration.

The preference among less proficient readers for reader bound responses and the preference among proficient readers toward reader-focused reflections is similar to Thomson's (1987) distinction between "empathising" and "analogizing." Thomson distinguishes between "students who draw on personal experience to inform their understanding of fiction, and students who, as well, go on to derive implications for their own lives from their reading" (1987, p. 198). The fact that less proficient readers in this study produced nearly half of their responses in the "reader bound" category suggests that these readers might have been reading in a highly personal, idiosyncratic way. They were perhaps able to "empathize," in Thompson's terms, but were less likely than proficient readers to "analogize," using their personal reactions as a way of reflecting on the

text.

Subsequent qualitative analyses of the stances adopted by proficient and less proficient readers in this study revealed a tendency among less proficient readers to disengage and escape the interpretive process when texts posed difficulty. Results of this qualitative analysis are presented in the following section.

Stances in Exploring Life and Literature

As the following exploration of readers' stances demonstrates, proficient readers in this study shuttled back and forth from self to text for the purpose of "connecting and extending" their own experience and understandings with the experiences potentially embodied in the literary text. Less proficient readers, on the other hand, often tended to disconnect from the literary response and interpretive process, escaping into personal reverie or getting lost in textual difficulty.

Connecting and Extending

The ten proficient readers in this study tended to use personal and textual information in order to make connections and extend their understandings of their personal world, the text world, and the world beyond.

In focusing on their own world, they built personal understandings out of the stuff of literature and textual understandings out of their own experience. In focusing on the text world, they identified and grappled with sources of difficulty, envisioning literary interpretation as a problem to explore, rather than a puzzle to be solved (Davison, King, and Kitchener, 1990), and embracing the essential difficulty and complexity of literary interpretation (Hynds, 1990b). Finally, they used the literary

text to understand the larger world, as well as their personal experiences. The following excerpts from proficient readers' written responses illustrate this connecting and extending stance.

Connecting and Extending: The Reader's World. When proficient readers in this study focused on their own personal experience, they tended to use the text as a springboard for understanding their own lives, to use their own lives to interpret and re-interpret the text, or to adopt some combination of these stances. Their responses were generally marked by a shuttling back and forth from personal to textual experience.

Notice, for instance, how Jack in this response to "The Fourth of July" uses his autobiographical recollections to explore the text and deepen his understanding of both his world and the text's world.

> The first paragraph of this story made me wonder about the time period. The attendant washed the window, but the bill was for fifteen dollars; I couldn't decide if it was present, past, or future. Chuck's relationship with his girlfriend reminds me of a relationship I have with my girlfriend; good girl, bad boy. My girlfriend has often told me to avoid trouble, so I found it easy to relate to Chuck. I also have had run ins with the police and the judicial systems resulting in situations where I felt the law didn't work and justice was not done. In this sense I definitely can relate to Chuck's feelings of anger and resentment. I do feel he handled it much better than I would have. Sager would have woken up one morning with his throat slit if he had stolen my money. I did like the method Chuck used to strike back with the gasoline. I do think he should have tossed the M-80 into Sager's car, but with a warning from my

text to understand the larger world, as well as their personal experiences. The following excerpts from proficient readers' written responses illustrate this connecting and extending stance.

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> girlfriend still echoing in my ears, I probably would have ditched the firecracker myself. The conclusion was appropriate. I don't think I would be satisfied if the only revenge I could get would be stranding the guy. I do see Chuck's girlfriend's point of letting it pass. As much as I love revenge, I sometimes wonder if it is worth screwing up my life just to get back at someone.

In this excerpt, Jack seems to test the validity and truthfulness of the text in light of his experience. He says, for instance, that Chuck handled his anger and resentment "much better than I would have." He also compares the text-at-hand with some ideal text in his head, as he observes that "the conclusion was appropriate." Jack's observation ("with a warning from my girlfriend still echoing in my ears, I probably would have ditched the firecracker myself") shows that he is comparing the believability of Chuck's actions, in light of his own.

At the same time as he is testing the validity of the text, he is also moving back and forth from self to text in an apparent effort to make sense of his own life. He begins by comparing his own love relationship with Chuck's. He notes, for example, his feelings of identification with Chuck's anger and resentment. Toward the end of his response, he discusses the ways in which his reaction might differ from Chuck's, concluding at last with a personal reflection on the pitfalls of getting revenge ("As much as I love revenge, I sometimes wonder if it is worth screwing up my life just to get back at someone."). Thus, Jack uses the text as a way of evaluating and understanding his personal experience. His focus, ultimately, is on making sense of his own life, as well as the world of the text.

Betty, another proficient reader, draws heavily on her personal feelings and experience in her response to "Fourth of July." Unlike Jack, however, Betty's response is focused more on getting meaning out of the text, than on exploring her own personal circumstances. In this excerpt, she is constantly propelled back into the text by her emotional and personal responses:

> This story dealt with a serious betrayal of trust and friendship. Chuck trusts Jack to stay alone in one part of the house as he goes into another. The result is that he gets money stolen from him. Should he get revenge given the chance? I can feel Chuck's feelings of hurt and anger at this betrayal. His parents even warned him against this guy, but he wouldn't listen. And he paid the price. I understand how he feels; I've had the best of friends betray my trust in the same type of way, taking advantage of a situation. It makes you feel low and depressed, angry that someone could take advantage of your vulnerability. Chuck had his chance. He could have claimed revenge. When Jack showed up at the station, Chuck was upset. He could have sent him away or refused to serve him, but he didn't. He made a grown up statement that made sense. However, he did get revenge in a small way. He took Jack's money and deprived him of gas. That was good in that it gave him some satisfaction in knowing that he'll pay partly for what he did. Then by the end, he didn't think about Jack or his revenge. He did get some revenge but in a very small way so he didn't feel guilty about it.

Notice how Betty intertwines her initial assessment of the story's

theme (betrayal of trust and friendship) with events from the story. She begins by exploring the central conflict in the story, searching all the while for textual information. Betty then draws on her personal experience with betrayal to confirm her notion that Chuck's actions are believable. Finally, she returns to the text by considering Chuck's resolution of the conflict in light of the story's theme.

Thus, while Jack begins and ends his response by reflecting on his own personal experience, Betty seems to use her own personal experience as a way of reflecting on the larger meaning of the text. In both cases, these proficient readers are able to weave personal perspectives and recollections into an enriched understanding of themselves, as well as the literary text.

Connecting and Extending: The Text World. Proficient readers in this study often focused on the text world. Their responses occasionally began with initial confusion over the text's meaning. However, unlike less proficient readers, who tended to become mired in this confusion, proficient readers seemed propelled by their temporary confusion to search for more complex and compelling interpretations.

Wanda, a proficient reader, seems to pose a series of rhetorical questions as a way of beginning a larger exploration of the purpose and theme of "The Stone Boy:"

> I think the story was very sad. I can't imagine a family acting that way. I thought the imagery was good, but I couldn't grasp the point. Why did Arnold go and pick peas instead of telling his parents? Why wouldn't his parents defend him or listen to him? I think the symbol of him standing there in his nakedness was excellent because not only

was he literally standing there naked, but he was 'naked' and ready to confess to them. I don't think he was mean. I simply think he couldn't deal with what he had done. Arnold was in shock and he thought the best thing he could do was to continue on with his chores. Then when everyone else calls him mean, he gets scared. What if he is? All in all, I didn't enjoy the story. It made me grateful for the family I have, but it made me uncomfortable with the knowledge that there may be families like that.

Her initial confusion over the meaning of the text seems to drive Wanda to search for answers. Although she complains of being unable to "grasp the point," she quickly moves toward the recognition that Arnold's nakedness is a symbol. This insight leads her to explore his psychological state and hypothesize about the reasons behind his seemingly bizarre actions. Although she focuses somewhat negatively on the text, she is still able to draw personal and symbolic meaning from the experience.

Brad, another proficient reader, also delves into the realm of the text world, as he makes critical evaluations about the validity of the story's theme and the quality of the author's craft. Notice how Brad weaves his own emotional response into a critical appreciation of the story:

Excellent! I was there through the whole thing. The tension started building from the moment where he assured his girlfriend (reluctantly) that he wouldn't do anything. I could feel my own hands shake when he was trying to light the M-80. It would have been great no matter what, but at that critical moment, he held back and propelled himself past the limits of the standard, "good guy getting revenge after the

system screwed him" ending. The girlfriend was really intriguing. She seemed to under control and composed. She could make Chuck act only with a look from her serene, commanding eyes. Nothing upset her. Part of the appeal of this was that Chuck got realistic revenge. He got back the eight dollars and got some consoling from the fact that the man would soon run out of gas. Only in the movies would a green Buick burst into a ball of flames as Chuck walked defiantly down the street, credits rolling.

Brad's response weaves together a knowledge of literary and dramatic conventions, and an aesthetic appreciation of the author's style. His journey into the text world reveals a more positive experience than Wanda's. He appears to be comparing the literary text-at-hand with a hypothetical text (a movie version), concluding at last that "only in the movies would a green Buick burst into a ball of flames as Chuck walked defiantly down the street, credits rolling." Thus, while he is obviously personally involved with the story, he is able to step back and evaluate the text, in light of another hypothetical "text."

Connecting and Extending: The World Beyond. Sometimes proficient readers focused not on the text or their own personal experience, but on a point beyond. In this stance, the world at large became a reference point against which to judge the actions of characters, and a context within which to understand the story's overall meaning.

In her response to "An Ordinary Woman," for instance, Sally begins from a position of negativity and uncertainty, moving toward abandonment of her reading. She moves quickly, however, to a stance which allows her to speculate on the problem of drug abuse in society, and the appropriateness

of inappropriateness of parental actions. She remarks:

> This story did not thrill me. I get no feeling for the character, but the point was valid. I think that drug abuse is a very serious and unrecognized problem. The fact that a fire brought Caren's problem to her mother's attention proves the point. Mrs. Brooks seems to be blaming herself for her husband's death and her daughter's drug problem which was an ineffective sob story. Overall, she seems to be quite rational in her decision to change the locks in order to prevent Caren from coming back. I think that I would do the same thing because the whole house could burn down the next time. However, I have to consider another perspective. The girl desperately needs help and if her own mother turns her away she may never get the treatment she needs. I guess I would have to live the situation to decide the course of action I would take. I was expecting Mrs. Brooks to have an affair with David because she seemed so desperate to escape her pain. I may have been expecting such things from reading love stories and watching soap operas. I think that an incident between Mrs. Brooks and David would have helped the story---made it more interesting and diverse.

Sally's opening reader bound responses embody her negative feelings for the story; however, she immediately assumes a "point-driven" stance (Vipond and Hunt, 1984) and relates the significance of the story to the world at large. Her language in this response is exploratory, disconnected, disorganized. By the end of the response, this disorganization is still apparent. However, far from being lost in her reading, Sally seems to be using her unfolding responses in order to

question her assumptions about the world at large, as well as the author's techniques. She reflects, for instance, that if Caren's "own mother turns her away she may never get the treatment she needs."

The same kind of tension can be seen in her speculation about how the author should have written the text. She recognizes, for instance, that she may have expected Amanda Brooks to have an affair with the locksmith because she "may have been expecting such things from reading love stories and watching soap operas." She is aware of her own expectations as a reader, and uses this awareness to speculate on how the author might have made the text more "interesting and diverse."

Clearly, Sally has not solved the societal dilemma of drug abuse or the personal dilemma of being helpful to one's children, while looking out for one's own safety. Nor has she set forth a clear suggestion for how the text might have been written. Her response is tentative and exploratory. It seems apparent, however, that while she focuses on a point beyond the text, she continues to return to it in an effort to make sense of both the work and the larger human issues surrounding it. Similarly, she temporarily leaves the text world in an attempt to speculate on how the author might have made the experience more meaningful to the reader.

Similarly, Brad shuttles between his ideas about the world-at-large, his own life, and the text-at-hand in his response to "A Young Person With Get up and Go:"

> Every child does this millions of times in his or her life. Kids go through short bursts of concentration where they are driven by a picture of an ideal setting. Until these dreams are snuffed out by the inconsiderate world or a new, prevailing goal, the child will

> divert all the energy into them. This piece reminds me of my father's childhood. He was an intelligent child, and the only amusement or encouragement he received was on his own. It is a shame a deserving child can be thrust into complacency unless he realizes that the only way to escape his confinement is to be patient and transcend the entire place. It is a terrible, selfish thought, but it is necessary for a fulfilling life after such a rotten childhood. This really makes me feel lucky for my house has always had decent meals, someone to honor my successes, and someone to keep me in line. The boy in this story has no one. He is even embarrassed of his house and family. He may still turn out alright without any outside support, but it will be a struggle.

Brad begins his response by considering the "real world" dilemma of children in oppressive or limiting circumstances. He moves from the larger world to his own family, as he compares the protagonist's situation with that of his father, who had little help from family, and whose "only amusement or encouragement was on his own." He moves next to his own circumstances ("my house has always had decent meals, someone to honor my successes, and someone to keep me in line"). His final reflection signals a return to the story, as Brad speculates about the main character's plight ("He may still turn out alright without any outside support, but it will be a struggle."). Thus, Brad weaves his speculations about the world into his reminiscences about his own family, and ends with a consideration of the main character's circumstances.

On the whole, then, proficient readers in this study tended to adopt a connecting and extending stance in focusing alternately on their own world,

the text world, and the world beyond. Through their encounters with literature, they appeared to shuttle back and forth from self to text, or from text to the world, in order to make connections and create new knowledge about themselves, the text, and the larger society.

Disconnecting and Escaping

While proficient readers in this study focused their responses on themselves, the text, and the larger world in order to create new meanings for themselves, less proficient readers often tended to use these same responses as a way of disconnecting and escaping from the literary encounter. In this stance, less proficient readers seemed to escape into some combination of their own autobiographical reminiscences, their doubt and confusion about points of literary interpretation, or their generalizations about the world. The following section will illustrate this disconnecting and escaping stance among less proficient readers.

Disconnecting and Escaping: The Reader's World. Often, less proficient readers seemed to use their personal experience as an diversion from, rather than a springboard to deeper meaning. Kerri, a less proficient reader, illustrates this disconnecting and escaping stance, as she compares Chuck's experience in "Fourth of July" to her own experience:

> I would not let bygones be bygones if I knew one of my friends stole something of mine. I would try as hard as possible to make them admit that they stole it. If that person refuses to admit it, they couldn't be my friend anymore. I would probably feel the same way Chuck feels. Knowing me I would plan a thousand different ways to plan revenge against them. It's kind of ironic that I read this story this week. Last weekend someone stole money out of my dorm room. My roommate

lost much more money than I did. Unfortunately, I have feelings that a close friend stole the money. Although I have no proof, I don't have the right feelings about her story about what went on this weekend. I don't want to think that she stole it, but circumstances led me to believe that she did. If she actually did steal it, I probably will never speak to her again. I wish that we could live in a world where there was no crime.

Although Kerri begins her response by making an indirect reference to the text, she quickly becomes so engaged in her own experience that she seems to detach completely from the text, concentrating instead on making sense of her own world. Her final comment that she wishes "we could live in a world where there was no crime" signals that she has moved to a point very far away from exploring the meanings and messages of "The Fourth of July."

Similarly, Sam responds to "A Young Person With Get Up and Go" by getting lost in a personal reverie about the families of friends he has known.

I didn't care for this story at all. It didn't have a lot of detail and wasn't interesting. I found some parts boring and other parts repulsive and sickening. Sure the kid in the story had it bad and I felt sorry for him but I still didn't like the story. I have met people from families of this sort. I've been to houses that sounded like this one. I usually go once and that's enough for me. These type of people make me sick. I cringe at their sight. These are the type of homes you enter and the odor attacks you, choking until you feel you must leave but you can't because that would be rude. So you

> sit there trying to look comfortable while you become sick of the smell of smoke and the general cleanliness of these peoples' surroundings. It's a bad situation to be in when you walk into a friend's house for the first time under these conditions. What do you do? You like your friend and he keeps inviting you back. You don't want to go but you overcome the odor and the outlooks of the house because you like your new found friend and you don't want to hurt his feelings.

Sam begins with a negative comment about the story's lack of detail and repulsive images. He moves quickly to a lengthy digression about families of people he has known and the conflict between loyalty to friends versus his own desire for cleanliness and order. His reminiscences seem to propel him away from a consideration of deeper issues in the story--the protagonist's shame, the motivations behind his actions, and so forth. Like Kerri, Sam becomes lost in his own personal circumstances and unwilling or unable to respond to the text-at-hand.

This tendency to become mired in autobiographical associations has been described by Vipond and his associates (1990) as follows:

> When the text is used not as a conversational partner ... but as a pretext for exploring one's own memories and images, one has drifted into what may be called an "associative" mode; the dialogue has become a monologue. (p. 130).

Thus, this "monologic" reading ends up by cutting readers off from the reading experience, rather than drawing them in. Reading is seen not as an active shuttling between textual and personal experience, but as an occasion for escape into personal reverie and association.

Disconnecting and Escaping: The Text World. In addition to disconnecting and escaping through autobiographical reminiscences, less proficient readers also appeared to disengage through an exaggerated focus on their own doubt and confusion with the text.

Alyce's response to "A Young Person with Get-Up-And-Go" is characteristic of some less proficient readers. In focusing on her confusion, rather than the story, Alyce seems unable to shift stances and integrate information from the text in order to formulate a series of hunches and hypotheses essential for literary reading. Alyce responds:

> This story was confusing. I found it very hard to keep my attention on what I was reading. I found myself drifting away from reading the story and thinking about what I was going to do when I left here, what I was doing tomorrow, and when I would be leaving. I had tons of thoughts entering my mind as if I was subconsciously pushing my mind away from concentrating on what I was reading, almost as if I would rather be pumping gas into my car than sitting here reading this story. Out of all the stories, I liked this one the least. It was nice to read about a family, but I didn't understand exactly what was wrong with the mother. It seemed very complicated and really boring and dragged out. This definitely wasn't one of my favorites.

In her frustration with this story's difficulty. Alyce slips into an account of her feelings and her struggle with concentration. Briefly, she tries to retrieve some sense of the story. However, she quickly relinquishes the thought and disengages from the text instead of trying to push on her confusion and search for a deeper meaning.

Less proficient readers' detachment from and rejection of difficult

texts is similarly illustrated in Mitch's response to "A Young Person With Get-Up-And-Go:"

> This had to be the slowest and worst story I read. It was about a lazy family and that was about it. But one boy in the family did most of the work. It was not an interesting story at all and it was too long. It was a bad topic to write about and even harder to read and understand. It totally lost my sense of interest and it made no sense. How could a family survive if everyone was so lazy in the household? It really lost me. It was just a stupid story. How would a person just lay around all day and do nothing and be happy? I always have to be doing something or I get really bored. I don't even know the point this story is trying to get across. I could not live in a household of the family in this story because I would really be bored. I always have to keep busy or I get frustrated."

In this impression, Mitch's reaction to his difficulty in understanding the story is to reject the text by criticizing its length and topic. By initiating his own reverie, Mitch appears to dominate the text (Flynn, 1983).

The responses of Alyce and Mitch are similar to those of Galda's (1982) reader Emily, who became so immersed in her own version of reality that she could not accept the text on its own terms. According to Galda, Emily:

> [C]riticized the characters in the stories by comparing them with her personal vision of reality, with what she knew of and expected from "real" people. The characters in the stories were so realistic that they had, apparently, ceased to be fictional for her. When she read a

> realistic fiction story, she wanted characters who were exactly like her, who acted as she would act, thought as she would think. (p. 9) .

Disconnecting and Escaping: The World Beyond. Like their more proficient counterparts, less proficient readers also speculated about the world beyond the text. However, less proficient readers often tended to get lost in such speculation, disengaging from the potential meaning of the literary text, in favor of generalizations about the way life is or should be.

Jackson, a less proficient reader, begins by identifying, but quickly abandoning a discussion of theme in "Fourth of July."

> Want a story about real-life anger and frustrations? This is one for you. When someone screws you over in a big way, it creates lasting anger in your mind that's very hard to get rid of. It'll make you do things you'd never do on your own, like trying to kill someone. But no matter what you do, it's never enough, and that pain and anger lives on in your mind. Besides, M-80's will explode in water.

While Jackson is able to identify a thematic aspect of the story (real life anger and frustration), he does little to elaborate upon this theme. Instead, he lapses into a series of generalizations about the consequences of anger and frustration. What might have been an opportunity to explore other aspects of the story--the motivation for Chuck's actions, the subtle joys and the moral dimensions of revenge--turns into an abandonment of the interpretive task. Jackson's concluding statement about M-80s exploding in water seems to signal this abandonment. Typical of less proficient readers, then, Jackson appears unable to move beyond this global discussion

of theme to integrate supportive evidence, or to further develop his view of the text in any systematic way.

Similarly, Mitch, in his response to the same story, abandons his encounter with the text through an angry indictment of the judicial system:

> This story was very well written and was really very interesting. I liked it a lot. That was a good question whether or not I would get someone back if I had a chance at it. I really don't know if I would or not. It was a good way in the story to get him back and it was well done too. If someone stole $200 from me I would probably try to get them back if he really seems that he or she deserves it. I probably would do something like that if I had a chance to do it. It was a sneaky way to do it. I think this story was really good and well written. People should be punished if they break the law and just not told to not "Please don't do it again." That does absolutely nothing to them. It provokes them because now they can get away with it. That is what is wrong with our judicial system. This does not stop the person from committing another crime or the same crime again. It merely says you can get away with it so don't worry about it.

As these responses seem to suggest, less proficient readers in this study often seem marginalized from the interpretive and response process. Perhaps because texts are too ambiguous, or because their own personal circumstances are more focal than the literary experience, these readers often seem to adopt a stance that Langer (1989) calls "being out and stepping into an envisionment". Readers like Kerri, Alyce, Mitch, and Jackson attempt to "step into an envisionment", but are kept out by their inability to "use information from the text together with their background

knowledge to get enough information to . . . complete the process (Langer, 1989, p. 6)." Therefore, because they are unable to successfully enter into an envisionment, less proficient readers seem unable or unwilling to enter fully into the literary response process--often on the periphery, waiting to participate.

Mapping the Landscape

The foregoing discussion has revealed important information about how readers differ in terms of their overall types of response, their movement along the continuum of reader and text, and the stances that they adopt as they move along that continuum. A more concrete illustration is provided by comparing graphs of three proficient and three less proficient readers' responses to "The Fourth of July" (see Figure 2). These graphs represent the responses of Jack, Betty, and Brad (proficient readers), and Kerri, Jackson, and Mitch (less proficient readers), as they move along the five categories of response.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 reveals a rather typical pattern of responses exhibited by proficient and less proficient readers in this study. Not only do proficient readers engage in more reflective (as opposed to reader bound responses), but they seem more likely than less proficient readers to set a pattern of shuttling back and forth from one category of response to another as they move along the continuum of reader and text.

Discussion and Implications

The content analysis framework generated by this study provides a tool

for researchers and teachers interested in charting the shifting focus from self to text in readers' written responses to literature. While all readers' responses reflect a transaction between reader and text, this transaction appears to be qualitatively different for the proficient and less proficient readers in this study.

Proficient readers appear to use their own personal experience as one of several meaning sources in the literary encounter. They continually shuttle back and forth from self to text during the reading transaction. The majority of their responses to these literary works are closer to self than to text on the reader-text continuum. However, their responses are self-focused reflections, rather than reader bound reveries or personal, idiosyncratic digressions. In shuttling back and forth along the reader-text continuum, they often reveal a faithfulness to the text, combined with a personal investment or curiosity about how the text generalizes to their own experience and the world beyond. It is not in the least surprising that these readers are closer to the "reader" end of the continuum than MacLean's readers had been in their readings of journalistic expository tests. Their reading seems appropriate for the highly personalized, young adult stories they encounter. One possible explanation of these findings is that proficient readers in this study are approaching literary texts in literary ways, reaching toward what Langer (1989) calls "a horizon of possibilities," rather than becoming lost in textual or personal trivia.

Less proficient readers, on the other hand, seem more fixed in their positions along the reader-text continuum. Frequently, they begin a response with a global statement about the story or its theme, only to become fixated on an idiosyncratic reader bound digression. Rather than

using their own personal experience as another source of meaning, they seem to use autobiographical response as a diversion from the complex process of interpretation.

Similarly, confusion and doubt among less proficient readers seem to act as a stumbling block, rather than an invitation or catalyst to the search for deeper meaning. Less proficient readers often seem unwilling to accept the texts or the characters' behaviors on their own terms, tending instead to revise or rewrite whatever fails to match their expectations. Thus, they often find themselves on the outside looking in, rather than empowered or motivated to move through their interpretations. Their critiques or evaluations seem to stand in place of, rather than propel them toward any complex interpretive processes.

It is important to note, however, that even though informants came from classrooms where ungraded, exploratory writing was a regular part of the curriculum, proficient readers may have perceived the written task in this study as conforming to the traditional literary essay or argument. It is true that many statements in the written protocols weren't typical of academic writing (i.e., reflections on doubt or interpretive confusion), and seemed closer to expressive journal writing than formal literary essays. However, it is still possible that the shuttling back-and-forth between personal and textual reflection demonstrated by proficient readers is a habit, engendered by many years of writing literary essays where textual evidence must be constantly marshalled to support personal opinion. Thus, perceptions of classroom writing tasks, even in ungraded situations outside of the regular classroom setting, may have profound influences on the ways in which readers have been socialized to respond to literature.

It is possible that "less proficient" readers are placed in lower instructional tracks, partly because they have not learned how to demonstrate that they know how to construct an acceptable literary argument in their written work.

In future studies of literary reading, researchers might use this framework in exploring where the responses of groups of readers fall on the reader-text continuum, or charting the movement of particular readers as they respond to a variety of elicitation tasks. For example, studies capturing readers' "on-line" response processes (as elicited by oral "think-alouds") might alleviate the confounding problem of writing task perceptions on readers' responses.

Furthermore, this study compared proficient and less proficient readers responding to four young adult stories in a college setting. Researchers might also use this framework to compare readers of different ages, or readers responding to a variety of texts. Future studies, for example, might investigate differences in response when readers encounter texts which are intended for "literary," as opposed to "non-literary" readings (i.e., stories and poems, as opposed to technical or scientific articles).

In recent years, teachers have become fairly comfortable with the notion that there is no "correct" response to a literary text. This study further supports the difficulty of classifying any one type of response as best. If proficient readers tend to shuttle back and forth from self to text in literary reading, then a "good reading" cannot be neatly defined according to particular types of response in isolation. The continual and purposeful movement from self to text, as well as connecting and extending

stances, can be modelled by teachers in class discussions and writing assignments.

In becoming sensitive to the complexity of literary reading, teachers must also look behind the response itself to explore the stance underlying the response. Are readers, for instance, bringing autobiographical information to the literary experience in order to enrich or evade the reading experience? Do readers comment on a story's theme for the purpose of generating ideas about the text, or as a way of dismissing the work in a word or a phrase? Do readers' evaluations of the text or evaluations of characters' behaviors signal a rejection of the text world, or an invitation to explore its intricacy and multi-dimensionality? Finally, do readers' personal responses marginalize them from the reading experience, or enable them to move through it in a highly engaged and participatory way? As we chart our own exploration of these questions we will begin to understand the complex and ever-changing nature of the literary transaction.

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Table 1

System for Analyzing reader-text transactions.

I. **TEXT BOUND: literal, text-based statements from or about the text with no evidence of interpretation.**

i.e., "He is 12 years old." "His name is Anvil." "He started the car" "The author uses foreshadowing"

II. **TEXT-FOCUSED REFLECTIONS: commentary on aspects of the text as artifact and/or author's techniques.**

i.e., "I don't understand why the story is called..." "The first paragraph is not clear to the reader." "This story is sentimental"

III. **INTEGRATIVE PARAPHRASE: attempts to understand the text on a basic level. Simple summaries or paraphrases, focused on understanding or comprehension.**

i.e., "He was a young boy." (Here the observer has made an inference that a boy who is 12 is young). "He was always getting into trouble." "The thing with Sager was brought up."

IV. **READER-FOCUSED REFLECTION: inferences which go beyond understanding the text. Reflections on the world, work, characters, other texts, morals or themes.**

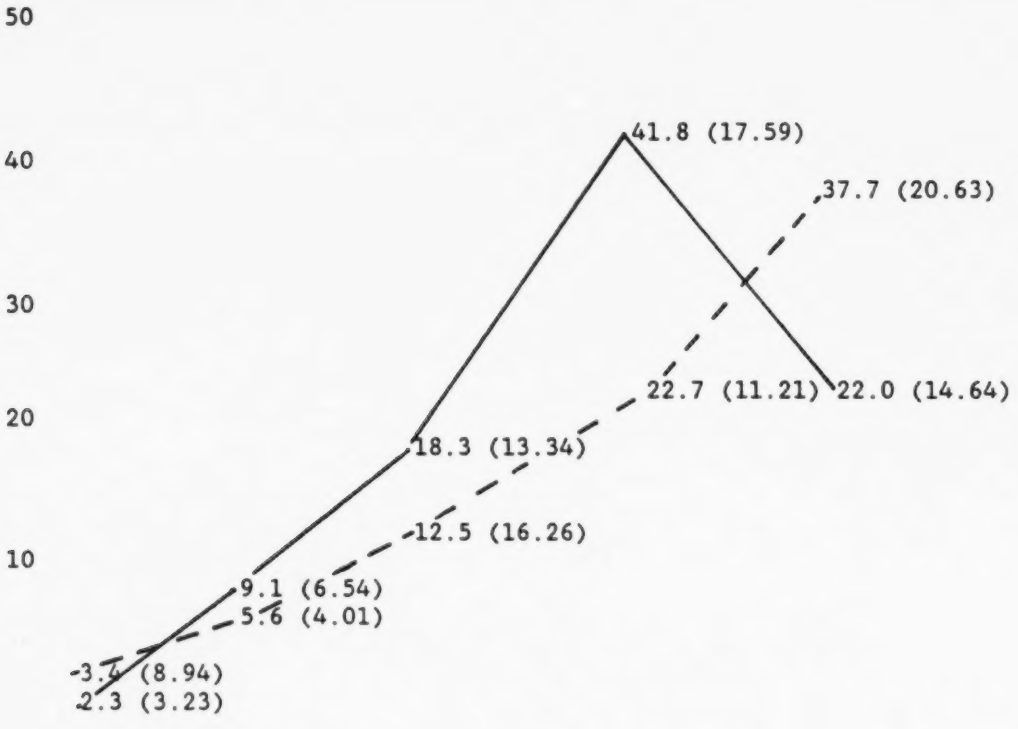
i.e. "He was a bully." "The story is about man's inhumanity to man." "This story is different than (another story)." "It was a good (humorous, exciting, etc.) story."

V. **READER BOUND: statements tied directly to the reader or events in his/her life which are only loosely related to the text. These statements focus primarily on the reader and his/her response.**

i.e., "I'm bored." "I feel sad." "Anvil reminds me of a boy in my high school." "I was pressed for time." "I couldn't figure out (some aspect of the story)."

Figure 1

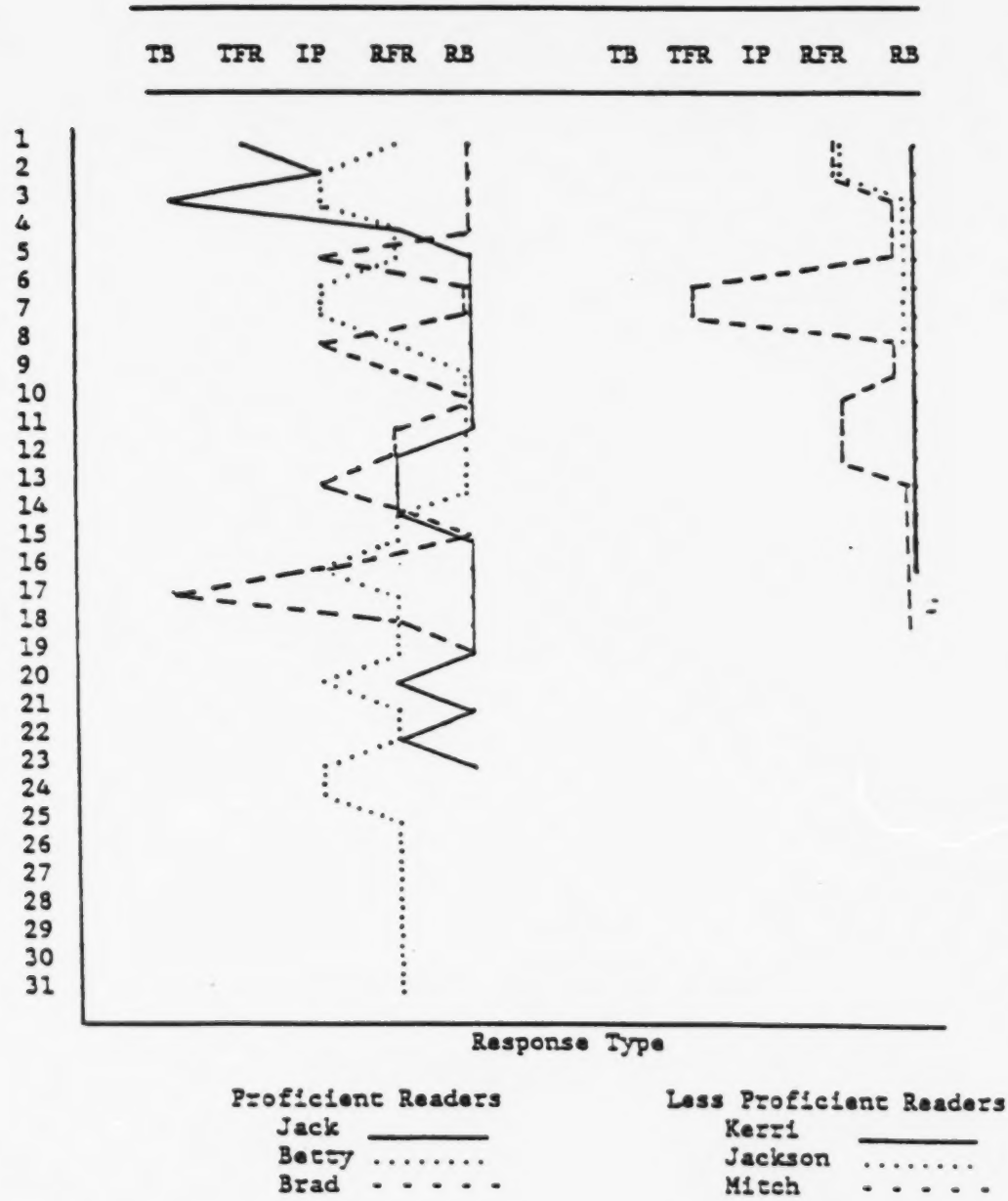
Comparisons of proficient and less proficient readers on average numbers of idea units across five categories of response.



Standard deviations are shown in parentheses

Figure 2

Response profiles exhibited by three proficient and three less proficient readers responding to "The Fourth of July"


TB TFR IP RFR RB
TB TFR IP RFR RB
Idea Unit
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31
Response Type
Proficient Readers
Jack
Betty
Brad
Less Proficient Readers
Kerri
Jackson
Mitch